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ABSTRACT

Project Equality, initiated by the College Board in response to the 17-year decline in high school students' college admissions test scores, is described. The project is an effort to enlist schools and colleges in a cooperative campaign to strengthen the quality of secondary education and to carry further the gains of equal opportunity made over the past 20 years. Conceived as a decade-long effort, the one-year-old project has begun with a comprehensive nationwide review of the college preparatory curriculum in the United States. In its beginning, the project has involved more than 400 school and college teachers serving on about 40 of the College Board's advisory and test development committees. It has sought the advice of an additional 100 or more professionals at schools and colleges serving inner city minority youth, and it has called upon the resources of others in education, government, and philanthropy. The participants in the projects have recommended a basic academic curriculum covering six subject-matter areas: English, mathematics, history/social studies, foreign or second language, natural science, and visual and performing arts. Additionally, six basic academic competencies have been defined: reading, writing, listening and speaking, mathematics, reasoning, and studying. The plan is to state the basic academic curriculum in terms of learning outcomes rather than simply course content or duration. Plans for 1981-82 include 34 dialogues on the subject-matter areas. Additional activities and anticipated results are noted. (SW)

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The College Board



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The essential point is not the formulation and conduct . . . of a single series of college admission examinations, highly important and significant as that is. The important thing is the close and intimate association of the secondary schools and colleges in dealing with a common interest and a common task. What this Board has done is to break down the isolation of the schools and the isolation of the colleges, and to bring them together in close and constant contact for the solution of their common problems.

From remarks by Nicholas Murray Butler on the 25th Anniversary of the College Board, November 6, 1925.

The College Board is a voluntary, nonprofit association of some 2,500 schools and colleges which since its founding in 1900 has been concerned with helping students make the transition from secondary school to college. It annually serves nearly two-and-a-half million students through its testing programs and about three million through its financial aid services. It conducts training programs and research, and publishes more than 26 million pieces of literature a year under some 200 titles. It is chartered to serve, among other purposes, "as a forum for the development of representative opinion with respect to educational standards."

Acknowledgments

Project EQuality has benefited from the advice of a great many people: high school teachers and college professors, curriculum specialists and chief academic officers, school and college administrators, agency officials and associational representatives, business and labor leaders, foundation and government officials, and many more. To all of them, too numerous to be named here but known to themselves, a deep debt of gratitude is owed by the College Board and by the students and the institutions which it serves.

George H. Hanford

September 1981

Project EQuality

Project EQuality was initiated by the College Board in response to the 17-year decline in high school students' college admissions test scores, a decline which has been interpreted widely as one sign that we are not educating our youth as well as we should.

Concern with this problem has inspired a number of major investigations of how to improve American education. The College Board believes that through Project EQuality, now one year old, it can make a unique and substantial contribution to the overall effort.

What is Project EQuality?

In its simplest terms, Project EQuality is an effort to enlist schools and colleges in a concerted cooperative campaign to strengthen the quality of secondary education and at the same time to carry further the hard-won gains of equal opportunity made over the past 20 years. Conceived as a decade-long effort, it has begun with a comprehensive, nationwide review of the college preparatory curriculum in the United States. It has started there in the belief that initial focus on the traditional and still largely central *academic* aspect of secondary schooling will produce a foundation on which programs of quality in all other aspects of education can be built for all students.

In its beginning, the project has involved more than 400 school and college teachers serving on some 40 of the College Board's advisory and test development com-

mittees. It has sought the advice of an additional one hundred or more professionals at schools and colleges serving inner-city minority youth. It has called upon the knowledge, experience, and wisdom of scores of others in education, government, and philanthropy. These preliminary discussions and inquiries have cut across traditional demarcations of grade level and academic disciplines to probe the basic problems that have contributed to a prolonged decline in the general level of academic preparedness for college in this country.

The explorations of Project EQuality in its first year have been in the tradition of other pathfinding work done by the College Board through the years—the commissions on mathematics, English, and non-traditional studies—all of which led to substantial change in the curriculum and beyond. But in terms of its scope and long-range intent, this project seeks to do even more.

Why Project EQuality?

There is little argument that great strides have been made since World War II in broadening access to postsecondary education in the United States. But there is strong evidence to suggest that the general level of academic preparedness for college has, on the whole, declined. That evidence includes the fact that average verbal scores on the Scholastic Aptitude Test declined annually from 478 in 1963 to 424 in 1980. Over the same period, average mathematical scores

dropped from 502 to 466 on the SAT's 200 to 800 scale.

Some would suggest that the former has caused the latter: that standards for academic preparation have been lowered simply to accommodate the increased numbers of students wishing to attend college. If this were the whole reason, an arbitrary elevation of standards by colleges and universities, acting unilaterally, presumably could "solve" the problem of quality—but at the obvious expense of equality, for fewer students would qualify.

Others would argue, with some justification, that the increasing pressures on the nation's schools and school systems to do more in the way of non-academic, vocational, physical, and social aspects of education have seriously diluted the resources that might otherwise have been devoted to academic preparation. If this were the entire problem, the high schools and school systems could—acting unilaterally—simply reject all else that they are asked to do by society. But such a solution is as shortsighted as it is impossible.

The College Board believes the need is for a cooperative search by schools and colleges *together* for solutions to improve *both* academic preparation for college *and* access to postsecondary opportunities for all Americans. Project EQuality is designed to provide a framework for such an effort. It is undertaken in the belief that improvement in this area is something on which schools and colleges can act now—and in exercis-

ing such leadership, enlist the understanding and support of teachers, students, parents, employers, taxpayers, and public authorities.

Why the College Board?

Providing a forum for the discussion of such issues is consonant with the Board's historic mission. The College Board was founded in 1900 to create a common understanding among its members of what constituted appropriate academic preparation for college. Its first examinations were developed to support that understanding.

The same concern that inspires the College Board's current interest in this area is also engaging the energies of many professional bodies, education authorities, and individual institutions and has motivated a number of other efforts at the national level to investigate the total secondary school enterprise. Currently these include the National Association of Secondary School Principals/National Association of Independent Schools review of quality in secondary schooling; the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching study of high school curricula in relation to college programs; and the Council for Basic Education project to reverse "curriculum sprawl." For the present, the College Board intends to work closely with these national and other similar, but more localized, short-term efforts in order to avoid unnecessary duplication. Over the long run, however, it

hopes through Project EQuality to provide both a focus and a vehicle for sustaining the momentum for constructive change now being generated.

In both contexts, the College Board offers two unique attributes. First, as a voluntary association of schools and school systems, colleges and universities, and other organizations concerned with the school-to-college transition, the College Board is well situated to foster a dialogue involving the secondary and higher education elements of its membership. Second, as a sponsor of services designed to ease the school-to-college transition, it is readily able to generate operational responses that can be sustained over time.

If a new and common understanding of what constitutes appropriate academic preparation for college is actually to result in active changes in curriculum and teaching practices, schools and colleges will need to work together closely, with both their faculties and their key administrators in touch with one another. The College Board has a proven capability to bring about this kind of collaboration, both within its membership and also within the broader education community.

Achievements to Date

The College Board believes that meaningful improvement in education can come only through voluntary agreement and action by school and college people themselves, work-

ing in close cooperation with students, parents, taxpayers, and public authorities. Therefore, Project EQuality is aimed at building consensus and fostering cooperation rather than imposing arbitrary or unilateral demands upon institutions.

During 1980-81 a consensus was reached by a broad cross-section of the educational community on what academic preparation for college ought to be in the decade ahead. The consensus involved three determinations:

- first, that there are six learning skills, or “Basic Academic Competencies” that students entering college for the first time should have;
- second, that students should have a record of achievement in six subject-matter areas defined as the “Basic Academic Curriculum”;
- and third, that acquisition of the competencies and achievement in the curriculum are interdependent—that is, subject matter cannot be mastered without the necessary competencies and the competencies cannot be developed in a vacuum without reference to subject-matter content.

In short, the competencies—learning skills or “know-how”—and curriculum—what is learned or “know-what”—can be separately identified, but must develop together in the actual education process.

This consensus was built in three settings: in a series of “academic dialogues,” in

seven "urban dialogues," and in a national symposium.

The Academic Dialogues

In its early months, the project drew heavily upon the active participation of school and college faculty members and administrators from among the College Board's constituencies. Under the leadership of the Board's Council on Academic Affairs, these teachers, curriculum specialists, and academic deans who serve on the Board's advisory and test development committees took part in a series of "academic dialogues." Their deliberations, conducted by questionnaire and in meetings, ranged across all academic fields and sought to reach general agreement on what the academic components of secondary school preparation for admission to selective colleges and universities in the 1980s ought to be. They recommended a "Basic Academic Curriculum" covering six subject-matter areas: English, mathematics, history/social studies, foreign or second language, natural science, and visual and performing arts.

The Urban Dialogues

A second line of exploration was inspired by the College Board's Advisory Panel on Minority Concerns. It dealt with the needs of students planning to attend open-door or less selective colleges and universities. More than 100 representatives of school systems

and colleges serving large numbers of inner-city youth took part in a series of seven "urban dialogues" convened with financial support from the Ford Foundation. They were held in Atlanta, Chicago, Hartford, Los Angeles, Minneapolis, Nashville, and Washington. Each was asked to consider the essentials for college-level work. A draft statement defining six "Basic Academic Competencies"—reading, writing, listening and speaking, mathematics, reasoning, and studying—emerged from these dialogues.

The National Symposium

The findings of the urban and academic dialogues were brought together in a three-day symposium supported by a grant from the Ford Foundation and convened by the College Board in St. Louis in May 1981. Here some 60 participants from the urban and academic dialogues were joined by about an equal number of other school and college faculty members and administrators, representatives of educational associations and public authorities, and others. They were asked to review the findings of the earlier dialogues and to develop them further.

This intensive three-day effort produced strong confirmation that the Basic Academic Competencies and the subjects in the Basic Academic Curriculum are interrelated and important. But the most significant outcome was strong agreement that *both can and should be used to define the preparation that all college-bound students*

should have regardless of the type of higher institution they plan to attend.

The participants further agreed upon a description of each of the Basic Academic Competencies which outlines the things a student should know how to do in order to do college-level work. They also agreed on the general outline of the subject areas of the Basic Academic Curriculum. But they believed that a specific description of each, comparable to those for the Basic Academic Competencies, should be developed only after additional consideration and refinement by subject-matter and curriculum specialists.

These agreements are set forth in greater detail in a supplementary document, *Preparation for College in the 1980s*. (To receive a copy, please see the last page of this booklet.)

That document should be considered, at least as far as the Basic Academic Curriculum is concerned, a work in progress. But it is important to emphasize that, just as the Basic Academic Competencies that it describes may be acquired in a variety of settings, so the plan is to state the Basic Academic Curriculum in terms of learning outcomes rather than simply course content or duration. This approach is being taken so that the competencies and the curriculum may be adopted by different schools and communities in ways that are harmonious with the other missions and goals of individual schools and school systems.

Next Steps

If Project EQuality is to serve as a vehicle for constructive change, it must consolidate agreement within the educational community about the nature of college preparation for the 1980s and then use the agreement as leverage by which to strengthen the quality of education in *all* its aspects for *all* students.

Given this formulation, Project EQuality will place primary emphasis during 1981-82 on achieving agreement on learning outcomes to be expected in each of the six subjects of the Basic Academic Curriculum comparable to that achieved during 1980-81 on the nature of the six Basic Academic Competencies.

Twenty-four dialogues, four in each of the six subject-matter areas, will be conducted in the spring of 1982. Further dialogues to consider the Basic Academic Competencies involving school and college personnel will be encouraged.

But enough groundwork is already laid to permit other steps in 1981-82. Already contemplated are activities designed:

- to involve representatives of business, industry, labor, government, and the military in dialogues about the Basic Academic Competencies to determine in what ways, if any, their needs differ from those necessary for college preparation.
- to encourage the college and university members of the College Board, and others,

to adopt the Basic Academic Competencies and the Basic Academic Curriculum as an expression of their preferences, if not their absolute requirements, with respect to academic preparation for college.

- to draw upon the experience of successful remedial programs at the college level to guide secondary schools in upgrading their college preparatory programs.

- to involve parents, taxpayers, and public authorities in the work of Project EQuality.

- to foster the creation of an "academic lobby," which, without attacking the other interests which seek to make use of school time, could publicly advocate strengthening the academic side of schooling.

- to encourage the establishment of model cooperative efforts involving schools and colleges in local communities to improve academic education.

The first such model effort was launched in San Antonio, Texas, on May 14, 1981, with the announcement of a \$1 million, three-year grant from the Minnie Stevens Piper Foundation to the College Board to support activities designed to increase substantially the number of college-bound minority students in Bexar County, and at the same time to inaugurate actions to improve the quality of the college-preparatory curriculum throughout the country.

In October 1981 one phase of the program will begin with the free administration of the Preliminary Scholastic Aptitude Test/

National Merit Scholarship Qualifying Test (PSAT/NMSQT) to all eleventh grade students in the San Antonio area. Test results will be used along with other criteria to help identify minority students who should be encouraged to consider moving on to college. Additional activities will provide special counseling, remedial help, and exploration of financial aid opportunities in cooperation with schools and colleges in the area.

A second part of the program will enable students who score high on the PSAT/NMSQT to undertake Advanced Placement courses. There will be extensive supporting activity in the San Antonio area, including special teacher preparation and workshops, student orientation programs, and the development of special academic materials and supplies.

The comprehensive approach in a metropolitan area with a large Hispanic population should provide interesting and useful information for later stages of the EQuality effort, and may well become a model for similar endeavors that typify fundamental goals of the project—to improve and extend *quality and equality*.

Anticipated Results

To the extent that Project EQuality does help to insure that appropriate academic preparation for college is available to students, it should contribute to some desirable results. For example, it will have helped to:

- increase both the proportion and the number of students prepared for college work. (This is an important result for colleges and universities faced with continuing decline in the size of the college-age group.)

- make it possible for more minority youth to go to college. (The participants in the urban dialogues are convinced that most minority and majority youth alike can acquire the Basic Academic Competencies. Knowing what the expectations are is an important beginning.)

- decrease the need for remediation in college. (Because more than 50 percent of students going on to college from high school today require some kind of help, this result would be most welcome.)

But these anticipated results have to do with efforts to improve college preparation per se. When combined with efforts of the other agencies and authorities currently concerned with the quality of secondary schooling the anticipated results could include the following:

- restoration of public confidence in the mission and performance of American secondary schools with the results that

- more dollars will be made available
- the role of teachers will be better recognized and more highly valued
- conditions for learning in the school will be improved;

- greater emphasis on the academic side of schooling with results that

- teachers and schools can spend more time on student mastery of the sub-

ject matter which is the basis on which they are evaluated

- more teachers with strong professional commitment to academic subjects can be attracted to teaching in the secondary schools;
- improved quality of secondary education with the result that
 - national manpower needs to compete in a world increasingly dependent on high technology will be better met
 - the aspirations of minority youth for upward social mobility will have much greater chances of realization.

In effect, the College Board has chosen to play the role of catalyst in upgrading the quality of secondary schooling in America through Project EQuality, in the belief that the long-range impact can be extraordinarily wide ranging.

If you share the Board's sense of urgency about establishing what college preparation should be about in the 1980s and would like to participate in the process, or even simply to be informed of its progress, please check the appropriate box on the following page and mail it to:

Project EQuality
The College Board
888 Seventh Avenue
New York, New York 10106

I would like to:

- ☐ Participate in a dialogue on the Basic Academic Competencies
- ☐ Participate in a dialogue on the Basic Academic Curriculum
- ☐ Participate in the development and conduct of a cooperative secondary school/college program designed to implement Project EQuality strategies in my community
- ☐ Participate in a Project EQuality program involving parents, legislators, business leaders, school board members, etc. in the process
- ☐ Receive the statement, *Preparation for College in the 1980s*
- ☐ Receive all Project EQuality publications and progress reports
- ☐ Receive a copy of the St. Louis Project EQuality symposium papers:
 - *Schools Make a Difference: A Review of the Issues Concerning School-College Transition Procedures* by Peter Mortimore
 - *Curriculum: A Key to Improving Academic Standards* by Michael W. Kirst
 - *A Study of Curriculum Content for the Future* by Harold G. Shane

Name _____

Title _____

Affiliation _____

Address _____

We hope you will join us in Project EQuality.